



CCM 2012 Testimony

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LABOR & PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE

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The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 90% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on bills of interest to towns and cities.

House Bill 5233 "An Act Concerning Workers' Compensation for Firefighters"

CCM opposes **HB 5233** as a new unfunded state mandate on towns and cities that would require professional counseling be compensable under the Workers' Compensation Act for firefighters diagnosed with mental or emotional injuries – defined as post-traumatic stress disorder -- as a result of witnessing a death of a firefighter.

From layoffs – to accessing reserve accounts – to eliminating library, transfer station, and community center hours – local officials are in the trenches when it comes to making tough decisions in these difficult economic times. **And, with this backdrop of fiscal peril – you have before you – a new unfunded state mandate, HB 5233.** As noted by OFA in similar proposals from years past **the costs of just one emotional stress case could be significant.** Adding a highly subjective, unfunded mandate to already constrained local budgets could do great harm

The professions firefighters have chosen involves personal risk and courage. Local officials have long supported public safety employees and their just compensation when injuries occur on duty and as a result of their work. In fact, in 2008 local officials negotiated in good-faith, reasonable benefits for specific cardiac emergencies while on duty. However, these special stress-related benefits proposed in HB 5233 would be simply unreasonable and unaffordable. Make no mistake, this proposed new mandate could be the "camel's nose under the tent" scenario – as proponents would seek to mandate additional special benefits down the road.

HB 5233 is unnecessary. Currently, local public safety officials receive health benefits that include professional, confidential counseling. **Furthermore, towns and cities already offer extensive Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) to employees suffering from stress.** These existing benefits provide all employees counseling, therapy, and other essential services to assist them and their families during difficult periods. This proposed mandate would unnecessarily and inappropriately create a new, costly special benefit – without any state financial aid – and thus, all at local property taxpayers' expense.